

NORMAL CHRISTIAN LIFE 10

Costing Everything; Gaining All

“Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.” – Matthew 7: 13-14 (NKJV)

“Then Jesus said to His disciples, ‘If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul.’” – Matthew 16: 24-26 (NKJV)

“Imagine yourself as a living house. God comes in to rebuild that house. At first, perhaps, you can understand what He is doing. He is getting the drains right and stopping the leaks in the roof and so on: you knew that those jobs needed doing so you are not surprised. But presently he starts knocking the house about in a way that hurts abominably and does not seem to make sense... The explanation is that He is building quite a different house from the one you thought of – throwing out a new wing here, putting on an extra floor there, running up towers, making courtyards. You thought you were going to be made into a decent little cottage: but He is building a palace. He intends to come and live in it Himself.”¹

Anything of great value is always worth a great price. We have heard this before. But it is not the way we live. Culturally, personally, even spiritually, we often define that which is good as that which is easy – and this is a lie. Christ promises us rest; He does not promise us ease. He promises us a yoke that is light, but it is a yoke nonetheless. We share it with Him and it therefore resembles His own: it takes the form of a cross. Author Joseph Stowell writes, “Cross-bearing is a willing predisposition to the inevitably of suffering with Christ and for Christ as I follow him. A cross is any tension or trial that is a direct result of following.”²

Jesus was very clear. Narrow is the gate and difficult is the way that leads to the life He offers. Few find it. And those few who do will lose their own life in the process. We cannot skim these words, uncomfortable with their weight. Let’s think about what defines ‘life’ for a moment. Fulfilling relationships; family togetherness; physically, emotionally, and mentally enriching experiences; our dreams and desires being actualized; satisfying work; a place we belong and feel significant – even if just in our own little corner of the globe. Every person is striving towards the realization of these issues in some capacity. Attaining them is considered that mark of a successful life and the lack of them is considered injustice. None of these things are evil and desiring them is not sinful. And yet... Christ tells us we must lose them all. He tells us the only way to save our life is to lose it. If these are the things that life is made of, then we must let go of every single one. And He doesn’t stop there. Not only does He tell us we must fling off every single aspect of life in order to make it through the narrow gate, but, in their place, we must pick up a cross. A cross. An instrument of torture and death. Twice our size, it is heavy and

Pre-Article Questions:

1. What something cost more, it is usually more valuable, what is the most costly thing you have ever purchased and what did it take to purchase this item?
2. What is the most valuable item someone has ever given you? What about it made it costly or valuable to you and how did this impact your relationship with that person?

1. Lewis, Clive Staples. “Mere Christianity.” The Complete C.S. Lewis Signature Classics. San Francisco: C.S. Lewis Pte. Ltd., HarperSanFrancisco, 2002. 163.

2. Stowell, Joseph. Following Christ: Experiencing Life the Way it Was Meant to Be. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1996. 200.

unmanageable. Even our Lord could not manage the one He bore. Picking up our cross assures us our blood will be shed and we will die. And yet Christ tells us to follow Him down this road of death to self if it is true life we desire. It is not a suggestion, and His message cannot be skewed. "...Christ calls us to come after Him...to count ourselves singularly, wholly, and without compromise fully devoted followers of Him – not as a part-time expression of, or add-on to, our Christianity, but as the all-consuming center point of our existence."³

Staggering at the other end of this weighty and seemingly unbearable call, we can't help but ask, 'How does dying lead to life? Why must it be so difficult?' God's intent is not that it be difficult for difficulty's sake. He is not out to beat us into submission and He does not desire that we live lives of sour-faced asceticism. But He does desire our holiness more than our happiness. And His vision for our lives is that we be filled with His life. This process of transforming us into holy saints and filling us with His divine nature takes place in a fallen world where we struggle with sin and temptation at every turn. It is a process of filling darkness with light; replacing death with life. How could we think that such an extreme, total, supernatural transformation would be free of difficulties and without demands? In Christ, we are new creations and no creation is ever brought forth without a certain amount of struggle, labor and pain.

God is about the business of building His kingdom in us and through us. As C. S. Lewis said, God intends to come and live in us Himself. He wants us to know Him intimately and reflect the image of His Son. This process of sanctification happens daily and it is often painful as we battle to put off the old self and abide in Christ. But every battle conquered is glory gained as God dwells in us more fully. And the greater His light within us, the greater we reflect Him to the watching world. The temple He is in the process of creating in each of us is complete with doors and windows, so that His glory and love might spill out of our hearts through our words and actions into the lives of those around us. The cost is very great: everything. But the reward is beyond anything we have ever seen or could ever imagine (1 Cor. 2:9). Through Christ, we have become sons and daughters of God. If we follow Him, the way will be narrow and difficult. The death of our self as we know it is certain, but we will emerge with a new self, filled with His life, prepared to rule and reign as co-heirs with Him forever.

Scripture Questions:

1. What is your reaction to the Lord's call to 'pick up your cross and follow Me'?
2. Read and discuss Matthew 7:13-14. Jesus said narrow is the way that leads to life and few find it. What does this reveal about the normal Christian life?
3. Read and discuss Luke 14:25-33. What are some characteristics this passage indicates are key to being a disciple of Christ?

Application Questions:

1. In our culture, what are two or three areas of life in which it is most difficult to go the 'narrow way'?
2. What are some ways you feel God might be challenging you to 'count the cost'?

Prayer:

Heavenly Father,

Thank you that your vision for our lives is even greater than the one we have. Thank you that you are committed to transforming us into your image and that you will not give up until we are perfect, as you are perfect. Forgive us for the ways we have not counted the cost and have made our relationships with you 'me-focused.' Help us to surrender the desires for every aspect of our lives to you and trust your plans for our futures. Please give us a deeper understanding of what you are doing in us, as well and a vision for eternity, so that we will be able to persevere in the midst of trials. Empower us by your Spirit so that we will not be afraid to lose our lives in order to find them – whatever the cost.

Prayer Partner Assignment:

Memory Verse:

Matthew 7:13-14, "Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few."

Matthew 16:24-26, "Then Jesus told his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul?"

In prayer, ask Jesus to reveal to you ways in which you might not have fully counted the cost of following Him. Journal about the areas of your life that you have not yet submitted to the Lord and ask Him to give you the grace to let them go and trust Him more fully. If these are current strongholds or worries in your life, make this your daily prayer each morning.

Meet with your prayer partner from this week for a meal. Read and discuss the additional readings listed for counting the cost of following Christ.

Additional Scripture:

Proverbs 4:10-19

Matthew 10:37-39

Matthew 13:44-46

Luke 14:25-33

1 John 5:11-13